


**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
311 WEST SARATOGA STREET
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201**

DATE: February 15, 2018

POLICY #: SSA-CW # 18-11
(This policy directive supersedes and replaces policy directive SSA # 04-04)

TO: Directors, Local Departments of Social Services
Assistant Directors, Services

FROM: Rebecca Jones Gaston, MSW 
Executive Director
Social Services Administration

RE: Family Services Planning

PROGRAMS AFFECTED: Child Protective Services and Family Preservation Services

ORIGINATING OFFICE: Child Protective Services and Family Preservation

ACTION REQUIRED OF: All Local Departments

REQUIRED ACTION: Compliance with the Policy Directive

ACTION DUE DATE: March 1, 2018

CONTACT PERSON(S): Brandi Stocksdales, LCSW-C
Director
Child Protective Services and Family Preservation
410-767-7561
brandi.stocksdales@maryland.gov

Stephanie Cooke, LCSW-C
Analyst
Child Protective Services and Family Preservation
410-767-7778
stephanie.cooke@maryland.gov

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to provide updated guidance to child welfare staff regarding the Initial Service Agreement, the Family Services Plan, and the Family Services Intended Action letter as well as documenting a family's progress or Plan of Safe Care on the Family Services Review form. These documents support and provide a link between the Safety Assessment for Every Child (SAFE-C), the Maryland Family Risk Assessment (MFRA), the Child and Adolescent Needs & Strengths-Family (CANS-F) assessment, and service delivery.

BACKGROUND:

The goal of all child welfare services is to help keep children safe from maltreatment, allow children to remain safely with their families, and ensure safe and timely permanency for children in foster care. Several federal mandates have been enacted to help support the goals of child welfare.

- The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), P.L. 111-320, authorized family preservation and family support services for each state receiving CAPTA funding.
- The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act, P.L. 112-34, of which the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) is a part, revised requirements for time-limited family reunification services provided to a child placed in out-of-home care, and to the child's parents or primary caregiver, to facilitate the child's safe, appropriate, and timely reunification with the parents or caregiver and to enhance the family's capacity to meet their children's needs.
- The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2016 (CARA), P.L. 114-98, amended the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act to require that a Plan of Safe Care be put in place for every substance exposed newborn ("SEN").

The **Initial Service Agreement, Family Service Plan, Family Services Review, and Intended Action Letter** are four documents used in the course of planning and carrying out family preservation service delivery. Use of these standardized forms ensures consistency in service delivery, decision-making, and documentation throughout the State.

ACTION:**Service Delivery Process:**

Targeted and trauma-informed service delivery is critical to ensure the safety of children, reduce the risk of future harm, improve family functioning and well-being, and assure permanency for children. The following documents are used to support the local department of social services' efforts to:

- Establish service goals and objectives within the family;
- Document in detail the services needed and/or provided to family members;

- Set timelines in which to achieve the identified goals; and
- Identify service interventions used to help the family maintain safety and reduce risk in the home.

Initial Service Agreement:

Program: Family Preservation Services

The Initial Service Agreement (DHR/SSA 1021) (“Agreement”) is used when on-going services are needed. The Agreement:

- Initiates a service contract between the Family Preservation worker and family, i.e. parents, stepparents, relatives, a live-in paramour of a parent, or any person who assumes responsibility for the daily supervision of a child;
- Identifies why the family came to the attention of the agency as well as the ongoing tasks to be completed by the family members and the Family Preservation worker; and
- Memorializes the willingness of the family to accept services from the Family Preservation Program.

Note: The Agreement should be completed even if the person who assumes responsibility for the daily supervision of a child refuses to sign. In this situation, the worker should note the refusal on the Agreement and in MD CHESSIE under “Contacts.”

The Service Agreement is available in MD CHESSIE for completion. The worker should give all appropriate family members a copy of the computer generated Agreement.

An Agreement should not be completed for Child Protective Services Responses or Services to Families with Children – Intake (SFC-I) cases.

Family Service Plan:

Program: Child Protective Services Responses, SFC-I (to include all ROH cases), Family Preservation Services

The Family Service Plan (DHR/SSA 1064) (“Service Plan”) is used to:

- Assist the worker and the family members in developing family-centered, trauma-informed, culturally appropriate service plans;
- Ensure the safety of all children in the family;
- Reduce the risk of future harm to any children;
- Improve family functioning and well-being of children; and
- Prevent any children from requiring out-of-home placement.

The information gathered in response to the various domains of the CANS-F will inform the goals, objectives, and tasks identified in the Service Plan.

Each action identified in a Service Plan should include:

- An obtainable objective based on an assessment of the combined factors of safety, risk, strengths, needs, well-being issues, and/or a court order;
- Identified services to support the objective;
- A means to measure success; and
- The date on which progress will be evaluated.

Relevant time frames:

- The plan must be developed within the time frames identified in Child Protective Services (07.02.07) and In-Home Family Services (07.02.01) regulations;
- The Service Plan can be developed and tasks initiated at the initial face-to-face contact with the family if safety, risk, and strengths and needs assessments have been completed
- Once in place, a Service Plan must be re-evaluated no less frequently than every 3 months, starting when the Service Plan was signed or last re-evaluated; and
- A new Service Plan must be put in place and signed no later than 6 months after the Service Plan currently in place was signed. (When a family has been open in Family Preservation Services for longer than 3 months, the worker must request an Administrative Extension from an agency administrator.)

Regularly reviewing case objectives with the family is the key to providing family-centered, trauma-informed service delivery. The CANS-F can help to guide the worker and family in reviewing progress and updating goals and objectives.

In families with an overwhelming number of needs, the CANS-F is useful in identifying immediate case objectives and those with lesser priority as they relate to child safety and risk.

The Service Plan should be developed collaboratively by the worker and the family. The worker's supervisor should review the plan with the worker to ensure information from the CANS-F is accurately reflected in the plan and is appropriate for addressing risk and the safety and well-being of the children and family. The Service Plan should be reviewed regularly by the worker and the family and by the worker and the supervisor during supervision.

The Service Plan is available in MD CHIESSIE for completion. The worker should give all appropriate family members a copy of the computer-generated Family Service Plan.

Family Services Review Checklist:

Program: SFC-I (to include all ROH cases) and Family Preservation and Inter-Agency Family Preservation

The Family Services Review Checklist (DHS/SSA 3003) (“Checklist”) should be completed as follows:

- **Services to Families with Children-Intake (SFC-I):** At the conclusion of an SFC-I assessment, which includes all Risk of Harm (ROH) case types, to document whether the family needs services to address safety, risk, or any child well-being issues;
- **Voluntary Placement:** At the conclusion of a Voluntary Placement assessment to document whether the family requires services to address safety, risk, or any child well-being issues;
- **Referrals of Another Agency (ROA):** At the conclusion of an ROA assessment to document whether the family needs services to address safety, risk, or any child well-being issues; and
- **Family Preservation Services:**
 - When Family Preservation Services are initiated and every 3 months thereafter;
 - When the local department has decided to close the case and discontinue services to the family;
- **Changes in Family:** Immediately following any changes in family circumstances, such as a removal or reunification of a child, that suggests a need for further services or if the change in circumstances introduces another safety or risk factor, or child well-being issue that changes the course of Family Preservation Services or court ordered services; and
- **SENs Assessment:** To document the federally mandated Plan of Safe Care of a newborn who has been identified as a SEN:
 - At the conclusion of the SEN assessment to document whether the family needs services to address:
 - Safety, risk, or any child well-being issues; and
 - Health and substance use disorder treatment services being provided to the affected family or caregiver.
 - When completing the Checklist in SENs cases, the worker should answer the first question to reflect that the checklist is being used as a *Plan of Safe Care*.
 - One Checklist should be completed per child. For instance, if twins were being assessed as SENs two Plans of Safe Care would be completed.

The Services Review Checklist is NOT available in MD CHESSIE at this time. A copy of the Family Services Review Checklist and instructions are available on the Department of Human Services intranet. Once completed, the Checklist should be scanned and placed in the File Cabinet. The file name should reflect the date of completion and whether the Checklist is a Family Services Review or a Plan of Safe Care.

Family Services Intended Action Letter:

Program: SFC-I (to include all ROH assessments), Family Preservation Services

The Family Services Intended Action letter (DHS/SSA 1068A) (“Intended Action letter”):

- Provides a family with notice that services are being discontinued or transferred to another service program;
- Outlines any recommendations from the Department;
- Documents the basis for the decision;
- If the case is being closed, provides information as to how the family can obtain additional services in the future; and
- Provides information on how to appeal the decision being made by the Department.
-

A worker may close a case even if all goals are not met, the risk rating has not been reduced to a specific level, or the CANS-F ratings identify service needs.

The decision to terminate services should be:

- Reviewed by a worker and the worker's supervisor to determine:
 - Whether terminating services is appropriate based on an evaluation of safety, risk of future harm, and family well-being; and
 - Whether the family should be referred to any community resources; and
- Made jointly by the worker and family.

If community resources are needed and identified, the worker should directly assist the family in obtaining these resources. Ideally this would be in the form of a "warm" hand-off.

If the agency's decision is to deny, reduce, suspend, or terminate services, the worker must send the Intended Action letter. The letter should be completed at least 10 days prior to the intended action and the case being closed in MD CHESSIE.

In accordance with State appeal procedures, the letter should:

- Briefly describe the reasons and basis for the agency's decision;
- Cite to the specific section of a law or the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) that supports the decision;
- Contain instructions for the family with regard to appealing; and
- Explain the Department's responsibilities and the family's rights.

The Intended Action letter is NOT available in MD CHESSIE at this time. A copy of the Intended Action letter and instructions are available on the Department of Human Services intranet. Once completed, the letter should be placed in the File Cabinet.